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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: NO SIGN PUK-GORAN TENSIONS ABATING IN
SULAIMANIYAH PROVINCE

REF: BAGHDAD 3346

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Classified By: RRT Erbil Team Leader Andrew Snow for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) This is an RRT Erbil cable.

12. (U) Summary: Recent violence in Sulaimaniyah Province (details reported reftel) may foreshadow a rough and dirty political struggle between the PUK and Goran ("Change") Movement in the runup to the March 7 national elections. Everyone from KRG PM Salih to Goran parliamentarians to the Sulaimaniyah Governor and Islamist party officials is worried. Goran insists it did not provoke a December 24 riot in Peramagron that put over 20 law enforcement officials and demonstrators in the hospital. It alleges numerous attacks on its members and calls on the authorities to investigate those incidents and provide better protection. The PUK suggests that Goran supporters exhorted the crowd to violence and encourages such demonstrations as a means to discredit the PUK. KRG leadership is counseling restraint, but there is little sign the KRG is actively trying to prevent or seriously investigate the attacks on Goran. Meanwhile, Goran leader Nawshirwan Mustafa has responded in kind to President Talabani's accusation that Nawshirwan helped bring about Saddam's use of chemical weapons. In a related development, the long-awaited "retirement" of Sulaimaniyah Governor Dana Majeed has occurred; Dana is now an open supporter of Goran. The absence of a strong governor in Sulaimaniyah in the coming months will likely hamper any KRG attempt to reduce tension and avoid violence. End summary.

WORRIES ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM AS TOP LEADERS SLING MUD

13. (C) The divergence of views between opposition and ruling party figures on where the blame lies for the recent uptick in tensions and violence between PUK and Goran in Sulaimaniyah is matched only by the unanimity across the political spectrum that recent developments are worrisome. Everyone from KRG PM Salih to Goran parliamentarians to Goran-sympathizer Governor Dana Majeed to the Politburo director of the Kurdistan Islamist Union has told the Ambassador's Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq (SANI) and RRToffs in recent days they are very worried. PM Salih said "it's more than a headache." He said President Talabani assured him there was no PUK policy of harassment of Goran, and the PM received similar assurances from PUK security chiefs. Salih said he "could not exclude" the possibility that "individuals" might have committed unsanctioned actions and is looking further into it. He stressed that the PUK has no interest in committing violence against Goran, since the PUK will suffer as a result. Salih and other KRG officials characterized Goran as poisoning the atmosphere with their obstructionist approach. Salih regretted that Goran leader Nawshirwan Mustafa had elected to publicly respond to President Talabani's accusations that Nawshirwan's actions in the run-up to Saddam's chemical weapons attack on Halabja had

contributed to the former regime's decision to use these weapons. In a lengthy rebuttal in the independent newspaper Hawlati January 5, Nawshirwan responded in kind, linking Talabani's own actions to Halabja. Nawshirwan said that Talabani 'will be responsible for any unwanted incidents taking place in the region.'

¶4. (C) Separately, KRG Presidency Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein (KDP) told SANI of his own grave concern that the unprecedented mutual vituperation between Nawshirwan Mustafa and Jalal Talabani would spur further violence, and certainly was harmful to the image of Kurdistan and corrosive in Kurdish politics. Accordingly, Fuad said he would urge Barzani to intervene urgently with the two leaders and try to contain the situation.

IT WAS THE OTHER GUY

¶5. (U) The December 24 riot in Peramagron has been the most visible event in the increasingly bitter Goran-PUK battle for political supremacy in Sulaimaniyah Province, and for seats March 7 national parliamentary elections. Predictably, each party (Goran considers itself a "movement") blames the other for the fact that the Peramagron demonstration got out of hand. Both sides note that there have been other incidents in past months.

THE PUK VIEW

¶6. (C) In a conversation with an RRT staff member, PUK Sulaimaniyah Center Chief of Staff Dara Qaradakhi (assistant to Hero Talabani, wife of the President) expressed his belief that Goran is cynically attempting to position itself as the champion of the common citizen and has capitalized on the admittedly poor performance of the PUK mayor in Peramagron for political advantage. Dara stated that he has a video made

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during the demonstration which shows Goran members setting fire to vehicles. He indicated that Goran is planning another demonstration in the town of Garmyan, Sulaimaniyah Province, and that the PUK has headed off other planned demonstrations in Halabja, Bazian, and Saidsadiq districts by actively "fixing their problems."

¶7. (C) At the national level, Kurdish Alliance Leader Fuad Masoum (PUK) took a more measured view. He blamed Goran for intentionally publicizing incidents and attributing everything to the PUK-Goran feud, but claimed such reports were overblown. Masoum did not deny that the demonstrations against (PUK) Mayor Awat in Peramagron occurred; however, he stressed that the disturbance was occasioned by the fact that the PUK mayor had wrongly insulted his constituency, and said it was not clear to him that Goran was behind them.

¶8. (C) A U.S. military source was told by locals that Goran supporters were key instigators of the demonstration, but probably had not planned for it to become violent. Goran supporters were allegedly seen bringing food to demonstrators as the protest continued into the evening. Reftel notes that Peramagron residents were seeking help from Goran head Nawshirwan Mustafa as early as July 2009. According to local sources, KRG PM Salih (PUK) was personally involved in managing the response to the demonstration. Sources indicate he instructed a Peshmerga unit, which was preparing to deploy into Peramagron, not to enter the town.

¶9. (C) In a conversation with RRT Team Leader, KRG MOI Karim Sinjari (KDP) said Goran had "added fuel to the fire." He instructed security forces not to fire on the demonstrators, but, the demonstrators opened fire on them first.

AND THE OTHER SIDE'S VIEW

¶10. (C) Sulaimaniyah PGOV Dana Majeed, on the other hand, emphatically blamed the KRG for the violence, specifically the KRG Deputy Minister of Interior (the PUK deputy to the

KDP's Sinjari). Dana told Team Leader the Mayor had secured the crowd's agreement to back off until the Mayor could secure an apology from the official who said the people of Peramagron were "blind." According to Dana, the Deputy Interior Minister declined to wait and sent in forces, thereby enraging the crowd and sparking the violence. Dana Majeed also told Team Leader that he had asked President Talabani to stay within the law, but that he did not expect Talabani to do so.

¶11. (C) Goran representatives emphasize that the Peramagron demonstration was not the first event in the current round of violence. Mam ("Uncle") Rostam, a venerated Peshmerga leader from Kirkuk and Goran activist, told an RRT staff member that he was angry that Goran was being blamed for the demonstration in Peramagron. He categorically denied that Goran had instigated the violence; rather, he said, Goran supporters had tried to calm down the situation. Qadir Haji Ali, a former PUK Politburo member who resigned the party in 2005, is responsible for Goran finance management. He told an RRT staff member about several recent provocations and insinuated that the PUK was behind them:

- Soran Abdul Qadir Kosat, Regional Director of the Norwegian Development Program and a well-known Goran supporter, was kidnapped from Sulaimaniyah on September 15, ¶2009. He was found in Kirkuk two days later and claimed to have been tortured.

- Bakhtiar Saeed, is an independent journalist who has written many articles about corruption and mismanagement in the KRG. His car was burned in front of his house on October 4, 2009, after he wrote articles about the dismissal of KRG employees who were Goran supporters.

- Unidentified gunmen opened fire on the Goran office in Erbil on October 12, 2009. - Goran member Fareeq Dara was severely beaten with iron pipes in front of his house by two assailants.

- Goran candidate Sardar Qadir was shot twice in the leg by an unknown gunman.

- Goran member Rauf Zarayani was murdered by unknown gunmen on December 25, 2009 in New Halabja.

¶12. (C) Qadir stated that the riot in Peramagron was the natural response to incompetent PUK management of the town. He noted that Goran leadership constantly reminds its supporters not to respond to violence with more violence, but said it was convenient for the PUK and KDP to point the finger at Goran in instances where events escalated. Kurdo Qasim, a former PUK Leadership Committee member and current Goran leader, noted that, should Goran choose to be more confrontational, it has the ability to mobilize simultaneous demonstrations in every district of Sulaimaniyah, as well as

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in other areas.

¶13. (SBU) On December 31, the Goran bloc in the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament (IKP) issued an open letter, citing several of the above attacks and expressing hope that "this series of offenses is not a state terrorism in Kurdistan Region (SIC)." The letter noted the lack of results of the investigations to date, held Presidents Talabani and Barzani responsible for ensuring the security of IKR citizens and calls for an urgent parliamentary session of the IKP. Goran parliamentarians told SANI that IKP Speaker Kamal Kirkuki has so far refused to hold the special session. The IKP is currently at the beginning of a two-month recess, which Goran believes is calculated to deny them a platform in the run-up to elections. Contacts also said Goran had filed suit through the judicial system in each case of violence.

¶14. (C) KRG President Barzani issued a public statement on

January 10 expressing Barzani's concern that recent developments could lead to an "abnormal atmosphere" in the IKR. (Comment: While the recent PUK-Goran violence is new in terms of the combatants' affiliations, political violence is not historically atypical in the IKR. End comment.) Barzani said political debate and divergent views were a "healthy phenomenon" and stressed that security and stability would be preserved in the IKR. In a meeting with MG Cucolo on January 11, Barzani confirmed press reports that he had chaired a meeting of political parties on January 10 in which political parties agreed they should cease media attacks. KRG head of external relations Falah Mustafa Bakir told RRT Team Leader that the PUK and Goran had welcomed President Barzani's efforts on the issue.

¶15. (C) COMMENT: The July 2009 KRG regional election, in which Goran scored big gains in Sulaimaniyah, was a major blow for the PUK, putting it on the defensive in what had been its stronghold. The vendetta between the two camps is turning increasingly nasty; at this juncture there appears to be little that could break the cycle of violence and bitterness. With leaders of both sides engaged in vicious personal attacks on their counterparts, there is little incentive for restraint at lower levels. The retirement of Sulaimaniyah's Governor, Dana Majeed, and his replacement by a politically weak acting Governor will further contribute to the vacuum of leadership, diminishing the ability of responsible actors to better manage festering tensions and sporadic violence.

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